

# On Structural Theories of International Relations: Examining Waltzian Structural Realism And Wallerstein's World System Theory

**Winner Agung Pribadi**

Jurusan Ilmu Hubungan Internasional, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik, Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta  
Ringroad Barat Tamantirto, Kasihan, Bantul 55183  
Email: [winnerpribadi@umy.ac.id](mailto:winnerpribadi@umy.ac.id)

## Abstrak

Tulisan ini mencoba melihat dua arus pemikiran yang sama-sama memiliki pengaruh dalam studi hubungan internasional, yakni realisme struktural (structural realism) yang diajukan Kenneth Waltz dan gagasan sistem dunia (world system) dari Immanuel Wallerstein. Dalam perspektif keduanya, pola-pola hubungan internasional mengandaikan adanya determinasi struktur maupun sistem besar yang melingkupi aktor maupun agen yang kehadirannya cukup penting dalam arus hubungan internasional mutakhir. Melalui kajian kritis atas keduanya, dengan antara lain memanfaatkan telaah kalangan konstruktivis, baik gagasan realisme struktural maupun gagasan sistem dunia telah mengabaikan peran agen yang memiliki peran menentukan dalam hubungan internasional. Pengabaian atas peran agen ini yang membuat kedua gagasan tersebut sangat reduksionis dan cenderung menempatkan struktur global sebagai sebuah unit analisa yang deterministik.

Kata kunci: Kenneth Waltz, Immanuel Wallerstein, peranan agen, konstruktivisme,, teori sistem dunia, teori struktural realis.

## Abstract

This article attempts to look at two currents of thought which both have influences on International Relations study, which is structural realism that proposed by Kenneth Waltz and ideas of the world system from Immanuel Wallerstein. In both perspectives, the patterns of International Relations is presuppose the existence of structure determination and large system which surrounding actor or agent whose the presence is quite important in current International Relations. Through both of critical reviews which are utilizing the constructivist study, both structural realism ideas and world system ideas were neglected the role of agents that have a decisive role in International Relations. The neglect of the agent roles made both ideas are reductionist and tend to attempt global structure as an unit of analysis which deterministic.

Keywords: *Kenneth Waltz, Immanuel Wallerstein, role of agents, constructivism, world system theory, structural realism theory.*

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## INTRODUCTION

International relations studies are constantly being contested amongst those who believe that it might be best approached through agential level of analysis, international structure, or those who focus on the co-constitution of agents and structures.

In this essay, I will critically examine the second academic camp; an approach that believes that structure shapes the nature of international relations (IR).

In order to do so, I will critically examine as well as compare and contrast the two most prominent structural approaches in IR, which come from two different academic traditions, namely Waltzian Structural Realism (SR) and Wallerstein's World Systems Theory (WST). The former posits that the international structural system of anarchy shapes states' behaviour. The latter, however, argues that it is also

structure that determines IR, but not political structure. Rather, it is economic roots that manifested in the capitalist world system.

My critically examination conclude that each theory has its strong point over another. In general, both theories have successfully used the structural approach in animating the phenomena of IR by constructing such rigorous, parsimonious, and straightforward theories. These theories can be easily understood and have stimulated a good amount of further research. Their valuable points however have not escapes from several significant flaws. Based on constructivism, I posit my critique as follows; First, they both overemphasize on structure and ignore the role of agents therefore they provide very limited room for change. This brings to mind the concept of constructivism; a good framework should be able to explain change. Secondly, both are reductionist theories in the sense that they reduce the agential role by overemphasizing the international structure and thus condensing the structure in terms of solely material elements (material power for Waltz and means of productions for Wallerstein).

I organize this essay into three parts. The first part explores the origins and basic terms of structural approaches in IR. Why does it matter? And how is it used to understand the phenomena of IR? In sections two and three, respectively, I go on to examine SR and WST based on these identifications of structural approach. The last part of my paper compares and contrasts as well as analyses the structural content of the theories by engaging the notion of constructivism.

## METHODOLOGY

### STRUCTURAL APPROACH IN IR

Following World War II, IR scholars, particularly those in the United States, adopted a behavioralist approach. This approach lays its theoretical foundation on a basic postulation of classical empiricism: knowledge can only be gained through direct observation and measurement Gaddis, 1993:12) To proceed with that kind of approach, behaviorists apply “bottom-up” research methodology, namely the

inductive method: “deferring the construction of theory until they have collected, measured, and compared as much as evidence as possible and after that cumulated, replicated, and thus verified” (Singer, 1972:249-251). In practice, the application of this methodology has been significantly helped by the wide use of research techniques such as statistical methods in quantifying a bulk of data into a certain generalization (Little, 1985:77).

The rise of behavioralist approaches has been heavily criticized. It has been argued that the inductive approach has failed to generate scientific understanding. This notion has stimulated scholars to find an alternative solution, which eventually led to the structural approach. Unlike its predecessor, the structural approach deals with invisible construction. That is, while this approach is difficult to observe and measure, it gives observable and measurable impact in shaping I (Gaddis, 1993: 13-14). In this sense, Waltz stresses that structure is something that cannot be seen, observed, or examined, but instead creates a set of constraining circumstances and produces homogenous output within various input (Waltz, 1979: 73). For the purpose of this essay, I identify structural approach in terms of four factors.

First, based on its origin, structural approach developed as a reaction to the academic fallacies of behavioralism. Reductionism and inductive research methods have often been criticised as being inappropriate methods to generate scientific theory. Structuralism then offers an alternative approach, called deductive methods. This is a “top down” approach that assumes the existence of unobservable phenomena in IR, uses the collection of empirical evidence to produce generalizations about them, and produces forecasts by projecting the resulting patterns into the future” (Gaddis, 1993:15).

Secondly, by deductive methods, structuralism has rested its analyses on totality or a systemic point of view. This notion of totality has three substantial meanings; first, it presumes the superiority of structure over processes; second, it clearly differs between structure and its parts (agents). Structure is compiled

by agents, but structure has its own identity which exists independently and autonomously from agents (Ashley, 1986: 265). Totality also emphasises the dominance of structures over agents (Ollman, 1976: 266). Agents have no independent behaviour or identity, except for that which has been imposed by structures.

Thirdly, the vast majority of structuralists believe in the predominance of structure over processes and agents, but they vary in how they define this structure. With the caution of oversimplifications, these dynamic definitions can be separated into two strands; minimalist-structuralism and holistic-structuralism. To explain this dichotomy, I will borrow Alexander Wendt's tracheotomy of the agent-structure problem (Wendt, 1987). The minimalist-structuralism is what Wendt calls individualism, and it refers to a limited definition of structural which "reduces the structure with its properties and interaction of its constituent elements" (Wendt, 1987). The holistic-structuralism, however, emphasises "the absolute ontological priority of the whole over the parts" (Wendt, 1987).

Employing these three identifications of structure, in the following two sections I will examine two of the most prominent structural theories, which represent different intellectual traditions.

## RESULT AND ANALYSIS

### WALTZIAN STRUCTURAL REALISM

Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* was not the first attempt to adopt a structural approach in theorizing world politics (Kaplan in Gaddis, 1993:29). Waltz, however, has become the most prominent structuralist amongst modern international relation theorists. His theory posits that the states' warlike behaviour is mainly shaped and constructed by international structure, which is anarchy. Anarchy is "politics in the absence of government" (Waltz, 1979). There is no single ultimate authority; "none is entitled to command; none is required to obey" (Waltz, 1979). Under these circumstances, each state must rely on its own capabilities and be ready to face any inevitable conflicts. This proposition clearly shows that Waltz has

reworked and polished Classical Realism through structural approach. Hence, why and how he constructed such a proposition can be traced by engaging four identifications of structure.

First, structural realism is a product of Waltz's reaction to classical realism's inability to give a scientific answer as to why states go to war. Using a Lakatosian construction of theory, (Reus-smit in Burchill and Linklater, Lakatos, 1970). Waltz maintains three key concepts of classical realism, namely state-centric, anarchy, and struggle for power. Simultaneously, he adds important logical thinking that has been overlooked by the classical. To say that the given malevolent behaviour of the states has been derived from the nature of man cannot scientifically explain the root of struggle for power amongst them. Waltz states: "the classical arguments that war is inevitable because men are irrevocably bad, and the argument that wars can be ended because men can be changed, are contradictory" (Waltz, 1959:13). Paralleling with structuralism critiques regarding behaviourism, Waltz argues that the inductive approach from which the nature of men was generated cannot give an adequate explanation of the nature of IR. Waltz then offers to find a solution using deductive method, which he found to be much more convincing than the inductive one. This debate between inductive and deductive methods had become Waltz's concern long before he developed SR. It has been systematically articulated in Waltz's *Man, the State, and War* in 1959 (Waltz, 1959). The book analyses three different perspectives, namely the first, the second, and the third image, that have been used by scholars in theorizing IR, particularly in regards to issues of war. Amongst these three images, Waltz positions himself in the third. This image emphasises and defends Rousseau's perspective that a theory of war is best theorized by the system level lens (the third image). Why does war happen? Waltz answers this question by echoing Jean Jacques Rousseau that: "Man's behaviour is a great product of the societies in which he lives.....war occurs because there is nothing to prevent it"(Waltz, 1959) This deductive approach of Rousseau leads Waltz to believe

that anarchical structure is the determinant factor that leads to war. The structural determination of IR has been developed by Waltz in his *Theory of International Politics* by drawing on microeconomic theory, assuming the emergence of an anarchical system as way of market (Waltz, 1979:88-93).

Secondly, Waltz attempts to construct SR as equivalent to the second identification of structure, i.e; a totalistic point of view. He points out: "The structure is the system-wide component that makes it possible to think of the system as a whole" (Waltz, 1979:79). To do so he traces what structural mainstream has done: first, he separates the structure from units (agents) level. Structure is not located and composed of units or an element of interaction among units, but an independent existing object. He persists that any systemic theory of IR should not be confused by including the behaviour of each state within the structure, but has to only concern the characteristics of the system (Waltz, 1979:80). Secondly, after structure is abstracted from the unit level's attributes, he proposes the superiority of the structure over the processes. As he points out: "structure may endure while personality, behavior, and interaction vary widely" (Waltz, 1979:80). Anarchical is presumed as international structure which endures along historical process. Thirdly, he also invokes the superiority of structure over agents. Anarchy constrains action and shape behavior states regardless of their domestic differences (Waltz, 1979:88-97).

Thirdly, although Waltz embraces the systemic point of view in which structure dominates agents, in defining the anarchical structure he embraces the minimalist-structuralism by reducing structure to minimalist terms. He abstracts structure from attributes of units (domestic economic, social, and political system, leadership, etc) and relation among units. What is left is a minor action of the units, which is how units are positioned or arranged to one another. This step is made because of the nature of structure which is abstract and cannot be seen. He points out: "Since structure is an abstraction, it cannot be defined by enumerate material characteris-

tics of the system. It must instead be defined by the arrangement of the system's parts and by the principle of that arrangement" (Waltz, 1979:80).

To make clear his definition of structure and to avoid reductionism as well as to gain parsimony, Waltz then constructs three identifications of political structures (Waltz, 1979:88-99): (i) the organizing principle; how units within the system stand in relation to one another, (ii) differentiation of units and the specification of their functions, and (iii) the distribution of capabilities across units. By the former he defines anarchy as the nature of an international system, which differs from hierarchy as the nature of a domestic political system. The second identification freezes the dynamic interest of states by saying that under an anarchical system, states function alike and copy the behaviours of one another. The dynamic notions of structure can only be found in the last point, which is the distribution of states' capabilities. Although states' capabilities, which are defined solely in terms of material power ("gun and money"), are states' (unit-levels) attributes, the distribution of capabilities is assumed to be a structural concept (Waltz, 1979:98). Redistribution of capabilities may be reflected in various structural forms ranging from bipolar models to multi-polar ones (Waltz, 1979:98). In short, Waltz minimizes the definition of international structure as anarchy that merely takes the distribution of states' capabilities as its own attribute.

Based on these three analytical forms, it is easy to say that Waltz has clearly demonstrated how war and the struggle for power amongst states can be theorized through structural approach. Within different strands we also see how a Marxist scholar such as Immanuel Wallerstein used this approach to develop his theory.

#### WALLERSTEIN'S WORLD SYSTEM THEORY

Similar to Waltz, Wallerstein presents a structural rationalisation of how actors behave in IR. However, due to their different academic traditions and priorities of issues, they consequently come up with different outputs. Unlike Waltz, who posits "high politics" as a determinant issue in his Structural Realism,

Wallerstein is consistent with the Marxist tradition. He posits that the economy is the key factor that subsumes other notions. It becomes “structural glue” linking each part of the structure to function together as a system.

According to Wallerstein, economic determinism is manifested in a world capitalism system that shapes the nature of IR, which has encompassed *long duree* human civilizations from the sixteenth century up to contemporary era (Wallerstein, 1979:6). The structure he named is the World (economic) System: “the only social system which we define quite simply as a unit with a single division of labour and multiple cultural systems” (Wallerstein, 1979:6). Such a world economy is rested upon the differentiated division of labour across states, faceted in three main zones: core, semiperiphery, and periphery, which are tied together by world market trade (Wallerstein, 1979:67). The core is characterized by its mature industrialisation, capital-intensiveness and high labour wages. The periphery zone, on the other hand, is structured by its weak industrialisation, labour intensiveness, and wages that are below subsistence. The semiperiphery zone lies between the two zones previously described. It is positioned as having an intermediate role, and is thus a stabilizer of the political structure of the world system. The type of relation between these three zones is hierarchical in terms of production and trade, dominated by the cores in terms of an exploitative relationship with an economic surplus running disproportionately to them (Wallerstein in Viotti and Kauppi, 501-513).

Since this theory is based on structural approach, similar to Neo-realism, it can be examined by those four identifications of structure. In terms of its origin, this theory that contains Marxism ideas reflects Wallerstein's efforts to challenge the modernization theory (Theda Skocpol, 1977). This theory presumes nation-states to be a basic unit of analysis through their evolutionary development followed by a single model flow from the traditional era to the contemporary era. Such theory is an ahistorical assumption that was generated from an inductive approach: it takes a

national development model, which occurs in major western countries, to be applied in all cases. Standing on this *rationale*, Wallerstein developed WST, a theory based on historical model building, generated from a deductive method, viewing the world based from a totalistic point without leaving history. In this sense, he notes: “that to be historically specific is not to fail to be analytically universal”, that “the only road to nomothetic proposition is through the historically concrete” (Wallerstein, 1974). This is consistent with what Wallerstein had done by developing the theory along with a historical analysis of the rise and development of capitalism since the sixteenth century.

Secondly, to be totalistic in explaining what structural approach should be, WST prioritises the structure over the process. Historical process, which happened across various events and structures, has been classified into two types of world systems: world empires (Wallerstein, 1974:348) and world economies. Furthermore, WST clearly differs between structure and agents. Structure is comprised of autonomous elements whose interactions constitute agents as a whole. Agents are constituted of subagents (subsystems) in which all of their positions are subordinated over structures that construct their identity and behaviour (Aronowitz, 1981:505). This means that within WST all states whose identities are based on nations, races, ideological orientations, geographic divisions, or other attributes are rendered, abstracted, and subsumed into the World System structure of those three economic zones. Even though Wallerstein admits the existence of non-economic identities that may dynamically change, by the theory he only recognises the international division of labour as being important to a state's identity and thus becoming the primary source of analysis. Indeed, how a domestic system functions within a state is also assumed to be operated and controlled by world capitalist structure (Wallerstein, 1974:349-351).

That totalistic point of view of WST is deeply related to the holistic-structuralism of WST in defining structure. According to Wendt, consistent with Louis Althusser, a Marxist structuralist who posits



“absolute ontological priority of the whole over the parts” (Smith, 1084:177), Wallerstein defines the structure of the WST “in terms of the underlying organizing principles of the world economy, and in particular of the international division of labor, which constitute or generate states and class agents” (Wendt, 1987:345-346). He makes one holistic entity of structure, by excluding and abstracting other elements such as states and domestic identity amongst other things. As Wallerstein puts in: “If the world systems are the only real social systems (other than truly isolated subsistence economies), then it must follow that the emergence, consolidation, and political roles of classes and status group must be appreciated as elements of this world system” (Wallerstein, 1974:351). Thus, existence and identity of states as well as their attributes is a product of their relations to the holistic function of the global capitalist system. Therefore, an explanation of a state’s agential role must always be linked to the world system. The holistic definition allows WST to explore the properties of structure not only regarding to how states are positioned in relation to other (as neo-realist), but also regarding how agents within the structure of core, semiperiphery, and periphery interact and relate one to another.

#### EXAMINING WALTZIAN STRUCTURAL REALISM AND WALLERSTEIN’S WORLD SYSTEM THEORY

The two previous sections have demonstrated how a structural approach is used by SR and WST in animating IR phenomena. Within this section, I will compare and contrast, as well evaluate these two structural theories. The differences between them can be elaborated in terms of determinant issues and defining structure. Within the former, Wallerstein insists on Marx’s claims that economy manifested in the mode of productions determines the social, political, and intellectual life. Rather than focusing on war and peace, WST deals with uneven development, poverty, and exploitation within and between nations. The main actor of IR is not state; rather it is class. Class can be defined by two terms: bourgeoisie and

proletariat. States are defined as political entities that are subsumed onto the interests of the dominant class.

Waltz, however emphasises politics rather than economy as being the determinant issues in IR. Waltz argues that IR is about politics; to understand it we can only rely on political theory. Responding Wallerstein’s WST, Waltz puts forward:

*“Wallerstein argues that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there has been only one world-system in existence, that capitalist world-economy. The argument confuses theory with reality and identifies a model of theory with the real world....An international political theory serves primarily to explain international-political outcomes”* (Waltz, 1979:38, Ashley, 1983:466-468).

Waltz explicitly critiques Wallerstein for those violating the privilege of political science of using economic deterministic model of analysis in examining international relations.

Within the latter, for Waltz, structure has to be defined using a minimal level of definition, merely in how it constrains and disposes the units’ behaviours. Structure has no independent identity other than what it has taken and manipulated from agential ones. For Wallerstein, structure is a holistic system; it is an aggregation of pertinent attributes of units and their interactions. Structure has an independent identity. In contrast to Wallerstein, Waltz states that the property of the system is not the hierarchical organisation of exchange relations, but the anarchical structure or the horizontal organisation of authority relations. It is not the principle of exploitation and asymmetrical exchange among agents within the hierarchical structure, but instead it is the principle of self-help by each state under the structure of anarchy.

In spite of their differences, both SR and WST are theoretical ambitious works that attempt to generate a grand theory of IR. To do so, they share the same commitment to structural approach. For Waltz and Wallerstein, to be structuralist is to avoid the problem of reductionism and choose a totalistic point of view. In regard to changes, they also share similarities, preferring to put their position in synchronic and

ahistoric views. They are hardly interested in change; for them the nature of IR works in terms of cyclical and continuous patterns; for Waltz it is defined as a universal and given concept of anarchy, whereas for Wallerstein it is defined as a mutable and *long duree* of hierarchal structure of world economy. They also have similarities in that they view IR in a negative sense; Waltz with its conflicting notions between states, and Wallerstein with the nature of exploitation between economic zones.

In regards to their relative merits, both theories have successfully drawn upon structural approach in animating phenomena of IR by constructing such rigorous, parsimonious, and straightforward theories which are easy to understand and have stimulated a good deal of further research. SR has successfully constructed its strong theoretical propositions from which it invites huge phenomenal debates either from its proponents (Gilpin, 1984, Krasner (1982b, Keohane, 1983) or opponents (Ashley, 1986, Ruggie, 1983, Cox, 1981) Within different levels, WST also attracts various comments from IR scholars (Chase-Dunn and Robinson, Zolberg, 1981).

So which structural theory is more convincing in depicting the nature of IR? I argue that each theory has its stronger aspects in some points over others. SR is more relevant than WST in framing the nature of IR during the Cold War Era. World War I and World War II have depicted that states' decisions to go to war is not driven by class conflict (economic factors), but is instead about the nationalism conception (political notions).

Within structural realism domination, however, WST has helped us to reveal another side of the international picture, that there are unequal economic relations or even forms of exploitation from one states or international actors to others. WST gives an "emancipation face" of structural approach that is not provided by SR. In this sense, WST is more relevant than SR in explaining the phenomena of developmentalism during the 1970s to the beginning of the 1980s.

Regardless of their relative strengths, the theories

have been failed to become such a "one fit all theory" which may predict and depict every historical phases, because they are only able to revealed one single puzzle of the complexity of IR. In addition, they face difficulties to explain change which in my point of view a good framework should be able to explain social transformation. Based on constructivism, those weaknesses are due to several reasons:

First, as has been mention in the previous sections, one of main goal of Structuralists is to overcome the worst faults of reductionism in developing theory. In fact, by consistency using structural approach, they are more likely to be trapped into the same failure as they predecessor did. To critique the reductionist problem that is embedded in WST and SR, I adopt a constructivist point of view. Most of my ideas are drawn from Wendt's agent-structure problem and the idea of the co-constitution of ideational and material factors in IR (Wendt, 1987:337-340). Wendt posits that the agent-structure problem is grounded in two axioms of social life that bring about most of the social theories (Wendt, 1987:338). The first are the human factors that function as active agents (Wendt, 1987:338) These factors create and recreate the social environment of their existence. The second axiom is the social environment in which humans are made that eventually creates a structure that guides and constrains how humans should behave (Wendt, 1987). Hence, according to Wendt, these axioms create theoretical guidelines between agencies and structure that co-determine and co-constitute one to another and becomes mutually dependent (Wendt, 1987). This leads to an analytical framework that allows us to scrutinise agencies without neglecting the structure which invokes the agencies to take action, just as how the examination of social structures raises some awareness of the agential roles which may affect or even reformulate the content of the structure. Giving a balanced analysis of agents and structure in which both are understood as "mutually constituted" entities leads us to believe that the properties of agents and those social structures are both relevant to explanations of social behaviours (Wendt, 1987).

In fact, structural approach, as has been adopted by SR and WST, has overemphasised the importance of international structure and has marginalised the dynamics of agential roles in IR. SR manipulates the property of the states (how they are arranged amongst each other) as the property of the structure without paying attention to other important properties of the states (domestic identity, relations between states) as determinant factors in understanding IR.

Waltz admits that there are always dynamic changes in the unit-level, either in terms of transportation, technological, or even nuclear weaponry. However, for him these changes are unimportant because the system remains anarchic (Waltz, 2000:5). He recognises, but at the same time abstracts those subjective and domestic attributes of states and focuses merely on the attributes of structures. By the same token, WST uses only property of the system (hierarchical structures, economic relations based on unequal exchange) and neglects the properties of the states. Any single attribute within states as well as their myriad functions has been highly marginalized in both theories.

If they pay attention to the property of the state, they tend to treat it as a given, unproblematic, and passive relational (states' properties are created as a direct effect of structure). For example, Waltz states that interest (self help, struggle for power) due to anarchy is a direct product of the anarchical system. Wallerstein posits that the interest of the states (expansion, domination, and exploitation) is a direct product of the world capitalist system. They construct uniformity assumption of states'/classes' interests - as a mechanical and technical consequence of living under structural system. They simply neglected the important role of agents in (re)create the structures. As a result they have serious problem in explaining the changes because their inability to recognize the properties of the agents as well as how they co-exist and co-constitute with the property of the structure.

Since they have no social theory of changes, SR and WST tend to develop such rigor and ahistoric propositions. These basic assumptions are taken as solid, given, timeless and universal, Waltz's anarchical system

is presumed as given and ahistoric. WST tends to be similar with SR. Even though Wallerstein analyses the rise and development of capitalism within a historical context, he seems to use history merely as an object of research by manipulating its historical evidence to support his world system theory (Aronowitz, 1981:511). Hence, Wallerstein ambitiously argues that within human history there are only two system structures that exist: the world empire and the world economy. Change occurring within these two structures is possible, but similar to Waltz's idea; limited space is given for the process. For WST, change can be explained in terms of "conjectural crisis" of cyclical, secular, and climatological factors.<sup>1</sup> Using this mode of crisis, Wallerstein explains the shift from the world of empire to the world of economy. It seems difficult to reverse this shift until the year 2050, as he has predicted Wallerstein, 1993:2).

As a result, both theories eventually create what Anthony Giddens refers to as "anti-humanist" (Giddens, 1979:38) perspectives in which it rejects the myriad human activities and their products within the long history of IR. The end of the Cold War Era became an unprecedented transformation that completely undermined WST's and SR's prediction (Wolforth, 1995:3). As a consequence, scholars have called into question their relevance for explaining the Post-Cold War Era and its subsequent complex transformations, such as globalisation, 9/11, complex humanitarian emergencies, etc.

The second flaw of the reductionist theory can be found in the emphasis on material factors and how it ignores the role of ideational elements in shaping world politics. SR and WST have shown how the structural approach has projected IR simply in terms of material aspects, either in the power politics of SR (struggle for power simply translated into a contestation amongst states in terms of "gun and money"), or in the world capitalist economic power of WST (in the means of productions). As consequences, the theories are solely able to explain one face of complex world politics. It deliberately put aside ideational realms such as values, norms, and knowledge, which in



my point of view -echoing constructivism- are much more important than material structure in constructing IR. As Wendt stresses: "material resources only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded" (Wendt, 1995:73) The US-Cuba and the US-Canada cases are good examples that illustrate this argument. The good relationship between the US and Canada on one hand, and the hostility of the US over Cuba on the other hand cannot be explained simply by the material balance of power (either politics-military or economics), because if so, the US should feel more intimidated by Canada than by Cuba (Reus-Smit, 2005:196). The importance of identity, ideology, culture, and norms can adequately explain these phenomena.

## CONCLUSION

Theories are simplified abstractions and reconstructions of what the theorist perceives to be the most relevant aspect of reality for his or her purposes. They can focus on micro or macro features of a system, and can embrace either complexity or simplicity. This essay has examined two theories in IR, namely Structural Realism and the World System Theory. These theories consistently use macro lens, scrutinizing the world from above, understanding the behaviours of the state from the "container" in which they live. SR posits that anarchical structure as "container" politics is a more convincing determinant factor in explaining states' behaviours. WST, on the other hand, argues that the world capitalist system overrides other notions and dictates how states and classes interact with one another.

In animating the nature of international relations, with many respects of the theories' contribution to IR studies I argue that both theories are far from being comprehensive in explaining the nature of IR. They are good as structural theories; unfortunately, what have been depicted is only one single puzzle of myriad structures of the complexity of international relations. The theories emphasise structural elements into mere material factors, which has made them unable to

reveal and analyse the remainder of the puzzle. They overlook the notion that ideational structures are important, and indeed, in many cases can dominate material ones.

Being structural theories, they ignore the dynamic agential actions as well as co-constitute between agent and structure. As a consequence, the theories become rigorous and ahistoric are thus unable to explain any transformations.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The cyclical crisis was triggered by the limit of technology in doing economic expansion that eventually led to certain period of stagnation. The secular trends are operated in the logic of the traditional Smithian concept of land diminishing returns that constrained the capability of the feudal economy to reach certain level of productivity required by its population. The last is to do with the climate change that happened for the period of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Europe.

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